اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah 85 - Al Buruj (The Constellations)

سُوْرَةُ البُرُوْجِ مَكِّيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

وَ السَّمَآءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوْجِ ۝١

(85:1) By the heaven with its impregnable castles; (1)

(1) Literally: By the heaven having constellations. Some of the commentators have interpreted it to mean the twelve signs of the zodiac in the heavens according to ancient astronomy, However, according to Ibn Abbas, Mujahid, Qatadah, Hasan Basri, Dahhak and Suddi it implies the glorious stars and planets of the sky.

وَ الْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُوْدِ ۝٢

(85:2) by the Promised Day, (2)

(2) That is, the Day of Resurrection.

وَ شَاهِدٍ وَّ مَشْهُوْدٍ ۝٣

(85:3) and by the witness and what is witnessed: (3)

(3) The commentators have expressed many different views about “the witness” and “that which is witnessed”. In our opinion what fits in well with the context is that it is every such person who will witness the Day of Resurrection, and that which is witnessed is the Resurrection itself, the dreadful scenes of which will be seen by all. This is the view of Mujahid. Ikrimah, Dahhak, Ibn Nujaih and some other commentators.

قُتِلَ اَصْحٰبُ الْاُخْدُوْ دِ ۙ﴿۴﴾

(85:4) the people of the pit were destroyed

النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُوْ دِ ۙ﴿۵﴾

(85:5) with fire abounding in fuel,

اِذْهُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُوْدٌ ۙ﴿۶﴾

(85:6) while they sat around it,

وَّهُمْ عَلٰى مَا يَفْعَلُوْنَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ شُهُوْدٌ ۙ﴿۷﴾

(85:7) and were witnessing what they did to the believers.
(4)

(4) The people of the ditch were those who had burnt the believers at stake and witnessed their burning themselves. Destroyed were: Cursed were they by God and they became worthy of Hell torment. On this an oath has been sworn by three things:

(1) By the heaven having constellations.

(2) By the Day of Resurrection which has been promised.

(3) By the dreadful scenes of the Day of Resurrection and all those creatures who will witness those scenes.

The first of these testifies to the truth that the Sovereign, Absolute Being Who is ruling over the glorious stars and planets of the universe, cannot allow this contemptible, insignificant creature called man to escape His grip. The second thing has been sworn by on the basis that the wicked people committed whatever tyranny they wanted to commit, but the Day of which

men have been fore-warned is sure to come when the grievances of every wronged person will be redressed and every wrongdoer will be brought to book and punished. The third thing has been sworn by for the reason that just as these wicked people enjoyed witnessing the burning of the helpless believers, so will all human beings on the Day of Resurrection witness how they are taken to task and burnt in Hell.

Several events have been mentioned in the traditions of the believers having been thrown into pits of blazing fire, which show that such tyrannies have been inflicted many a time in history.

One of the events has been reported by Suhaib Rumi from the Prophet (peace be upon him), saying that a king had a magician at his court who on becoming old requested the king to appoint a boy who should learn magic from him. Accordingly, the king appointed a boy. But the boy while going to the magician's place and coming back home also started visiting on the way a monk, who was probably a follower of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), and being influenced by his teaching turned to a believer. So much so that by his training he acquired miraculous powers. He would heal the blind and cure the lepers. When the king came to know that the boy had believed in the Unity of God, he first put the monk to the sword; then wanted to kill the boy, but no instrument and no device had any effect on him. At last, the boy said to the king: If you are bent upon killing me, shoot an arrow at me with the word: Bi-ismi Rabbil-ghulam (in the name of this boy’s Lord) in front of the assembled people, and I shall die. The king did as he was told and the boy died. There upon the people cried out that they affirmed faith in the Lord of the boy. The courtiers told the king that the same precisely had happened which he wanted to avoid: the people had forsaken his religion and adopted the boy’s religion. At this the king was filled with rage. Consequently, he got pits dug out along the roads, got them filled with fire and ordered all those who refused to renounce the new faith to be thrown into the fire. (Ahmad, Muslim. Nasai, Tirmidhi, Ibn Jarir. Abdur Razzaq. Ibn Abi Shaibah, Tabarani. Abd bin Humaid).

The second event has been reported from Ali. He says that a king of Iran drank wine and committed adultery with his sister resulting in illicit relations between the two. When the secret became known, the king got the announcement made that God had permitted marriage with the sister. When the people refused to believe in it, he started coercing them into accepting by different kinds of punishment; so much so that he began to cast into the pits of fire every such person who refused to concede it. According to Ali, marriage with the prohibited relations among the fire worshippers has begun since then. (Ibn Jarir).

The third event has been related by lbn Abbas, probably on the basis of the Israelite traditions, saying that the people of Babylon had compelled the children of Israel to give up the religion of the Prophet Moses (peace he upon him), so much so that they cast into pits of fire all those who refused to obey. (Ibn Jarir, Abd bin Humaid).

The best known event, however, relates to Najran, which has been related by Ibn Hisham, Tabari, Ibn Khaldun, the author of Mujam al-Buldan and other Islamic historians. Its resume is as follows: Tuban Asad Abu Karib, king of Himyar (Yaman), went to Yathrib once, where he embraced Judaism under the influence of the Jews, and brought two of the Jewish scholars of Bani Quraizah with him to Yaman. There he propagated Judaism widely. His son Dhu Nuwas succeeded him and he attacked Najran which was a stronghold of the Christians in southern Arabia so as to eliminate Christianity and make the people accept Judaism. Ibn Hisham says that these people were true followers of the Gospel of the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). In Najran, he invited the people to accept Judaism but they refused to obey. Thereupon he caused a large number of the people to be burnt in the ditches of fire and slew many others with the sword until he had killed nearly twenty thousand of them. Daus Dhu Thalaban an inhabitant of Najran escaped and went, according to one tradition, to the Byzantine emperor, and according to another to the Negus, king of Abyssinia, and told him what had happened.

According to the first tradition, the emperor wrote to the king of Abyssinia, and according to the second, the Negus

requested the emperor to provide him with a naval force. In any case; an Abyssinian army consisting of seventy thousand soldiers under a general called Aryat, attacked Yaman, Dhu Nuwas was killed, the Jewish rule came to an end, and Yaman become a part of the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia.

The statements of the Islamic historians are not only confirmed by other historical means but they also give many more details. Yaman first came under the Christian Abyssinian domination in 340 A.D. and this domination continued till 378 A.D. The Christian missionaries started entering Yaman in that period. About the same time, a man named Faymiyun (Phemion), who was a righteous, earnest, ascetic man and possessed miraculous powers, arrived in Yaman and by his preaching against idol-worship converted the people of Najran to Christianity. These people were ruled by three chiefs: Sayyid, who was the principal chief like the tribal elders and responsible for external affairs, political agreements and command of the forces, Aqib, who looked after the internal affairs and Usquf (Bishop), the religious guide. In southern Arabia Najran commanded great importance, being a major trade and industrial center with tussore, leather and the armament industries. The well-known Yamanite wrapper and cloak (hulla Yamani) was also manufactured here. On this very basis, Dhu Nuwas attacked this important place not only for religious but also for political and economic reasons. Dhu Nuwas put to death Harithah (called Arethas by the Syrian historians), killed Sayyid of Najrain and also killed his two daughters in front of their mother Romah and compelled her to drink their blood and then put even her to death. He took out the bones of Bishop Paul from the grave and burnt them, and ordered women, men, children, aged people, priests and monks, all to be thrown into the pits of fire. The total number of the people thus killed has been estimated between twenty and forty thousand. This happened in October, 523 A.D. At last, in 525 A.D. the Abyssinians attacked Yaman and put an end to Dhu Nuwas and his Himyarite kingdom. This is confirmed by the Hisn Ghurab inscription which the modern archaeologists have unearthed in Yaman.

In several Christian writings of the 6th century A.D. details of the event relating to the “people of the ditch” have been given,

some of which are contemporary and reported from eye-witnesses. Authors of three of these books were contemporaries with the event. They were Procopeus, Cosmos Indicopleustis, who was translating Greek book of Ptolemy under command of the Negus Elesboan at that time and resided at Adolis, a city on the sea-coast of Abyssinia, and Johannes Malala from whom several of the later historians have related this event. After this, Johannes of Ephesus (dated 585 A.D) has related the story of the persecution of the Christians of Najran in his history of the Church from a letter of Bishop Mar Simeon who was a contemporary reporter of this event. Mar Simeon wrote this letter to Abbot von Gabula; in it Simeon has reported this event with reference to the statements of the Yamanite eye-witnesses present on the occasion. This letter was published in 1881 A.D. from Rome and in 1890 A.D. in the memoirs of the martyrs of Christianity Jacobian Patriarch. Dionysius and Zacharia of Mitylene have in their Syriac histories also related this event. Yaqub Saruji also in his book about the Christians of Najran has made mention of it. Bishop Pulus of Edessa's elegy on those who perished in Najran, is still extant. An English translation of the Syriac kitab al-Himyarin (Book of the Himyarites) was published in 1924 from London, which confirms the statements of the Muslim historians. In the British Museum there are some Abyssinian manuscripts relating to that period or a period close to it, which support this story. Philby in his travelogue entitled Arabian Highlands, writes: Among the people of Najran the place is still well known where the event of the people of the ditch (ashab al-ukhdud) had taken place. Close by Umm Kharaq there can still be seen some pictures carved in the rocks, and the present day people of Najran also know the place where the cathedral of Najran stood.

The Abyssinian Christians after capturing Najran had built a church here resembling the Kabah, by which they wanted to divert pilgrimage from the Kabah at Makkah to it. Its priests and keepers wore turbans and regarded it as a sacred sanctuary. The Roman empire also sent monetary aid for this "kabah". The priests of this very "kabah" of Najran had visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) under the leadership of their Sayyid, Aqib and Bishop for a discussion with him and the famous event of the

mubahala (trial through prayer) took place as referred to in (Surah Al-Imran, Ayat 61). (For details. see (E.Ns 29 and 55 of Surah Al-Imran).

وَ مَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ اِلَّاۤ اَنْ يُّؤْمِنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ الْعَزِيْزِ الْحَمِيْدِ ۙ﴿۸﴾

(85:8) Against these they had no grudge except that they believed in Allah, the Most Mighty, the Most Praiseworthy,

الَّذِيْ لَهٗ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ الْاَرْضِ ؕ وَ اللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَیْءٍ شَهِيْدٌ ﴿۹﴾

(85:9) to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Allah witnesses everything. (5)

(5) In these verses those of Allah Almighty's attributes have been mentioned on account of which He alone deserves that one should believe in Him, and the people who feel displeased at one's believing in Him, are wicked and unjust.

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ وَ الْمُؤْمِنٰتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوْبُوْا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَ لَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيْقِ ؕ﴿۱۰﴾

(85:10) Surely those who tormented the believing men and the believing women and then did not repent, theirs shall be the chastisement of Hell, and theirs shall be the chastisement of burning. (6)

(6) Punishment of burning has been mentioned separately from the torment of Hell because they had burnt the oppressed people to death by casting them into the pits of fire. Probably this will be a different and severer kind of fire from the fire of Hell in which those people will be burnt.

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَ عَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ لَهُمْ جَنّٰتٌ تَجْرِيْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ ؕ ذٰلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيْرُ ؕ ١١

(85:11) As for those who believed and acted righteously, theirs shall be Gardens beneath which rivers flow. That is the great triumph.

اِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيْدٌ ؕ ١٢

(85:12) Stern indeed is your Lord's punishment.

اِنَّهٗ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَ يُعِيْدُ ١٣

(85:13) He it is Who creates for the first time and He it is Who will create again,

وَ هُوَ الْغَفُوْرُ الْوَدُوْدُ ١٤

(85:14) and He is the Ever Forgiving, the Most Loving

ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيْدُ ١٥

(85:15) – the Lord of the Glorious Throne,

فَعَّالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيْدُ ؕ ١٦

(85:16) the Executor of what He wills. (7)

(7) He is the All-Forgiving: If a person repents and reforms himself, he can hope to be received by Allah in His mercy. All-Loving: He has no enmity with His creatures that He would subject them to torment without any reason, but He loves the creatures He has created and punishes them only when they do not give up the attitude of rebellion against Him. Owner of the Throne, means that He alone is the Ruler of the kingdom of the universe: no one who is a rebel can escape His grip and punishment. The mention of His being Exalted is meant to warn

man for his meanness when he adopts an attitude of arrogance against such a Being. Last of all, "He is Doer of whatever He intends: no one in the entire universe has the power to obstruct and resist what Allah wills to do.

هَلْ اَتٰىكَ حَدِيْثُ الْجُنُوْدِ ۙ﴿۱۷﴾

(85:17) Has the story of the armies reached you,

فِرْعَوْنَ وَ ثَمُوْدَ ؕ﴿۱۸﴾

(85:18) the armies of Pharaoh and Thamud? (8)

(8) The address is directed to the people who in their false pride of having powerful hosts, are breaking the law of God on His earth. They are being warned, as if to say: Do you know what evil fate was met before by those who broke the bounds set by Allah on the strength of the power of their hosts.

بَلِ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا فِيْ تَكْذِيْبٍ ۙ﴿۱۹﴾

(85:19) The unbelievers are indeed engaged in denying it, calling it a lie,

وَّ اللّٰهُ مِنْ وَّرَآئِهِمْ مُّحِيْطٌ ﴿۲۰﴾

(85:20) although Allah surrounds them.

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْاٰنٌ مَّجِيْدٌ ۙ﴿۲۱﴾

(85:21) Nay; but this is a glorious Qur'an,

فِيْ لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوْظٍ ﴿۲۲﴾

(85:22) inscribed on a well-guarded Tablet. (9)

(9) That is, the writ of the Quran is unchangeable and imperishable. It is inscribed in the guarded tablet of God, which cannot he corrupted in any way. Whatever is written in it has to be fulfilled: even the whole world together cannot avert its fulfillment.